

The Outlook

A Running Commentary on Air Topics

Night Mails in Australia

INLAND letters in Great Britain bear no mark to show whether they have been carried by train or aeroplane, and the man in the London street does not often hear of a letter arriving with such surprising speed that it could only have come by air. In Orkney it is probably otherwise. At any rate, the principle is right, that the Post Office should use air services wherever they will expedite delivery, and that the public should not have to pay extra for that speed.

Australia is about to follow suit. Though the Commonwealth Government has been very loath to agree to the abolition of surcharge on Empire air mails, Sir Archdale Parkhill, the Minister of Defence, has just announced that next year mail planes will fly by night in Australia, and that letters between the capitals of the various States will be carried without surcharge. The surcharge will be maintained for the present on letters to other places in Australia, but Sir Archdale hoped that they, too, would eventually be abolished. This is far-sighted policy, and, like that of Sir Roland Hill, it ought in the long run to pay for its cost and a bit more. At any rate, it is making the Post Office what it ought to be—the servant of the public.

Troops by Air

THE Russian practice of dropping a thousand or more soldiers by parachute at one time has provided illustrated papers with some very striking photographs, and it has aroused intense admiration for the nerve of the Russian private soldiers who make the drops. Conceivably in certain campaigns against an uncivilised enemy this manoeuvre might have some military value. It would certainly have a moral effect. In European warfare, however, it is hard to see what useful purpose it could serve. It would take a considerable time to rally the battalion of parachute-men, and a small force of tanks or even of cavalry could mop them up long before they were ready for action.

India has just provided a much more useful example of air transport of troops. Every year a body of troops, usually a battalion, sets out on a three weeks' march to relieve the garrison of Chitral Fort, and Army Headquarters is always in a state of tension until the relief has been safely effected. Recently a small detachment of Sikh sepoys was flown from Rawalpindi to Chitral, and the return trip by air took only five hours. A good many Valentias would be needed to transport a whole battalion, but it is doubtful if the cost in money would be greater in the long run than the cost of the march. In addition there would be no risk of attacks by tribesmen on the way, while the speed of the movement would be an obvious advantage.

V. P. Vindication

ONE thing which the South Africa race has done is to focus attention on the merits of variable-pitch airscrews on modern aircraft having a wide speed range. At Portsmouth it was little short of marvellous to see how the Mew Gulls, for example, picked up immediately the throttle was opened, accelerated at a marvellous rate, and got into the air after a comparatively short run, in spite of their wing loadings of nearly 30 pounds per square foot. Nor is take-off the only part of aircraft performance

which benefits from the fitting of V.P. airscrews. Competitors in the race are getting fuel consumptions of about ten gallons per hour with the new Gipsy Six Mark II engines. Although this is due mainly to the special fuel, with its attendant possibility of raised compression ratios, the V.P. airscrew contributes its share towards the impressive ranges being obtained. No one would argue that all aircraft need variable-pitch airscrews, but the modern high-performance types certainly repay the weight and cost.

Apart from the increased safety which results from the greater range, the V.P. airscrew has probably been found of great value for getting off some of the race aerodromes in Africa. In fact, it is safe to assume that without it more than one machine would have had difficulty in "unsticking."

Small V.P.s

GOODNESS knows that our designers are slow enough to adopt new-fangled gadgets for their aeroplanes, but—give them their due—when they have sat back to watch points, and have been convinced that a device is worthy to be included on British aeroplanes, they frequently outstrip all foreign competitors in its development and application. Perhaps the best example of this is provided by the De Havilland variable-pitch airscrews which have been produced for the new series Gipsy Six. Everyone knows that the D.H. airscrew is a Hamilton, built in this country under licence, but everyone does not know that the Americans have not yet produced this type of airscrew in sizes small enough for use on the small inverted in-line air-cooled engine which is fast gaining in popularity over there. Only now are they testing a screw suitable for the Menasco Buccaneer, which is the American counterpart of the Gipsy Six. Before long a V.P. airscrew will be available in this country for the Gipsy Major.

And while on the subject of small V.P. airscrews, we must not fail to hand a bouquet to our good friend M. Ratier, who has unostentatiously done so much toward their development, and who has the happy knack of delivering the goods when the goods are badly needed.

Retractable

RETRACTABLE undercarriages have now been with us for quite a while, and on the whole have behaved themselves very well. There were three designs of retracting gear on Schlesinger machines, and such a race with its full-load take-off under varied climatic conditions should reveal any faults. But the pilots using them have had sufficient experience with their machines to learn to depend on their retracting mechanism, although one was toying with the idea of fitting a pair of roller skates to the fuselage bottom!

Of the three gears concerned, that on the Envoy is the best tried, being of the same pattern as used on the older Courier, and leaving a portion of the raised wheels exposed. The advantage of this was unintentionally demonstrated on Sunday, when the pilot of one of the Couriers on the I.O.W. ferry service found his wheels had decided to stay up (an almost unheard-of whim) before landing at Ryde. So he turned back to Portsmouth, set the Courier down, and his passengers just walked into a sister ship and were off again before half the crowd knew what had happened.